

TRANSLATING THE TRADITION: SOME REMARKS ON THE ARABIZATION OF THE PATRISTIC HERITAGE IN EGYPT

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The history of the way in which ancient Greek literature was transmitted to medieval Europe through the medium of Arabic is well-known to all historians of the Middle Ages. As the famous Arabist Franz Rosenthal has pointed out, it was not in Italy in the fourteenth century, but rather in Baghdad in the tenth century that what has been called the Renaissance began. The translation of the heritage of the early Church into Arabic is, however, much less studied and known, despite the fact that the emergence of Christian Arabic literature and the flowering of the Oriental churches, *their* renaissance, between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries was largely dependent on the work done by translators. This is especially true for the Coptic tradition, which in many ways differs from the Syriac and Greek (Melkite). On the one hand the Copts began to translate the patristic heritage much later than the others, especially the Melkites; on the other they completed the transition from Coptic to Arabic much faster and more thoroughly than the Syrians or Melkites. Until the eleventh century the Copts seem to have used Arabic as a written language only very reluctantly and sparsely. By the fourteenth century they had completely abandoned Coptic as a language of written communication.

The relatively rapid transmission from Coptic to Arabic, largely achieved in two hundred years, from the last decades of the eleventh century to the end of the thirteenth, is an almost unique historical process, which has great importance for the history of the Coptic Church. During the period of a few centuries a language, Coptic, with a long history and an important Christian heritage died, and during the same centuries the Copts created the bulk of the Christian Arabic literature of the Middle Ages.¹ Moreover, not only was this transmission responsible for the way in which the Coptic Church came to know and keep its patristic heritage, but it also governed the transmission of patristic literature to Ethiopia, since most translations of patristic texts into Ethiopic are based on Christian Arabic translations coming from the Coptic tradition.

¹ On the evidence for the decline of Coptic see L. MacCoull, "The Strange Death of Coptic Culture," *Coptic Church Review* 10, No. 2: 35-45. For the Christian Arabic Literature of the Copts see G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. II (= *Studi e Testi* 133), Città del Vaticano, 1947, 294-475.

A general study of this transmission, its causes, its development and its rapid success, is at this stage of research premature, since much of the material still has to be catalogued, edited and analysed, and on a more comprehensive level such a study will probably long remain impossible. Firstly, our remains of Coptic literature are in a very poor state. Complete codices of Coptic texts are relatively rare; most have to be patched together from leaves in various libraries, and thousands of fragments of Coptic texts remain not only unedited but even unidentified and uncatalogued. Many of the texts we still possess have come down in single manuscripts, often of poor quality, and for many patristic texts the Coptic version, which once existed, is lost.² Secondly, the medieval Arabic translations, mainly preserved in later copies, not without scribal errors, are in most cases unedited. The major reference work, Georg Graf's *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, is largely based on the catalogues of the collections of Arabic MSS, catalogues which often misrepresent the content of the MSS themselves, and, moreover, only covers the archives in the West together with the best known of the Orient. The MSS of most of the churches and monasteries in Egypt are not included. In spite of the fact that the first volume of Graf remains an enormous contribution to the study of the transmission from Coptic to Arabic, only the careful study and edition of the texts themselves, based on the collected evidence of the MSS, can give us a real basis for an assessment of this crucial historical development. Unfortunately, few scholars are qualified in both Coptic and Arabic, Coptic being taught as part of Religious Studies and especially New Testament, and Arabic as part of Semitic Languages.

In this article I will thus only highlight some aspects of this transmission, hoping to inspire and direct research into this rich and, for our understanding of the Oriental Christian tradition, important field. I will not even attempt to list the texts translated, nor the dates of translation or the translators as far as they have been noted. The list would be long and tedious, and still incomplete and erroneous. Neither Graf nor the majority of the catalogues of the collections give reliable information on the translation of a text, which must be based on careful analysis of the marginal notes which attest place and date of translation, and the name of the translator.

On the basis of the reports of the catalogues and editions published hitherto I would like to propose a periodization of the process of translations from Coptic to Arabic into three distinct phases, obviously with some overlapping. The first covers the early translations up to the middle of the eleventh

² For Coptic texts lost in their original and preserved in Arabic translations see S.K. Samir, "Arabic Sources for early Egyptian Christianity," in B.A. Pearson and J.E. Goehring, eds., *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 82-97; and Samuel Rubenson, "Arabic Sources for the Theology of the Early Monastic Movement in Egypt," *Parole de l'Orient* 16 (1990-91), 33-47.

century, a period in which Coptic remained the major written language of the Coptic church. The second starts with the translation of the large Coptic collections in the last half of the eleventh century and ends with the great revival of the Coptic church in the early thirteenth century, covering the period in which Arabic became the major language, but in which Coptic was still widely known, at least among the intellectual elite. The third covers the Golden Age of the Coptic church with its great Arabic authors of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, a period in which Coptic was only known by specialists, and translators became increasingly dependent on the use of grammars and vocabularies.

The First Phase

Although it cannot be ruled out that some early translations into colloquial Arabic were written down, the process of written translations from Coptic to Arabic seems to have started slowly in the tenth century, probably at the same time as the first known Coptic writings composed directly in Arabic by Sawīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa' and others. There is every reason to suspect that Sawīrus and other authors using Arabic translated Coptic texts *ad hoc* and then included them in their Arabic works. An example of this are the quotations found in his *Kitāb al-Durr al-thamīn*.³

Otherwise the earliest texts to have been translated would have been parts of the Bible, especially lectionaries and liturgical texts. There is, however, no study of the making of the Arabic Bible of the Copts, and the material in front of us is extremely confusing. On the one hand, the Copts took advantage of earlier translations of the Bible made by Melkites and Syrians as well as Egyptian Jews.⁴ On the other, they also made their own, probably often *ad hoc*, translations for bilingual liturgical and biblical manuscripts. In

³ Edited by P. Maiberger, "Das Buch der Kostbaren Perle" von Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa', (Wiesbaden, 1972). For more on this see the article by Dr. Mark Swanson in *Medieval Encounters* 2,1 (forthcoming).

⁴ For the translation of the Bible see *GCAL*, vol. I, 85-195; P. Kahle, *Die arabischen Bibelübersetzungen* (Leipzig, 1904); and J.F. Rhode, *The Arabic Version of the Pentateuch in the Church of Egypt* (St. Louis, 1921). The most important early contribution of the Melkites to the Arabic Bible of the Copts was the translation of the Gospels from Greek into Arabic by Theophilus Ibn Tawfil (Melkite bishop in Cairo c. 1040). This translation was later used by the famous Coptic scholar and translator al-As'ad Hibatallāh Ibn al-'Assāl in his revision of the New Testament in 1253. The Pentateuch was translated from Hebrew into Arabic by the Egyptian Jew Sa'īd b. Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī (892-942). This translation was used by the Copts as is evident from the revised introduction by Faḍlallāh b. Tādrus b. Yūsuf Ibn Faḍlallāh (cf. *GCAL*, vol. I, 101f., referring *i.a.* to Vat. copt. 1 (13th C.), Vat. copt. 9 (d. 1204/5, gospels), Vat. copt. 12, Vat. ar. 28 (translated by al-Wajīh Yūḥannā al-Qalyūbī), Par. ar. 12 and Vat. copt. 2, 3, 4); see Paul de Lagarde, *Der Pentateuch Koptisch*, 1867. Further comments on the Arabic translation as found in bilingual codices can also be found in Horner, *The Coptic Version of the NT in the Northern Dialect*, vol. I (Oxford, 1898).

the process of copying texts the translations were later revised on the basis of originals, Greek and Coptic, as well as on the translations of others. Lacking studies of the numerous early bilingual codices, we do not know much about this process and chronology, apart from the fact that translations were made from Coptic as early as the tenth century and that the production of more widely used official versions belong to the third period. As for the translation of liturgical material, the poor quality of the Arabic used and its evident Coptic background indicate that some Copto-Arabic liturgical texts were translated very early. But most probably translation here started with the rubrics, in order to help the congregation to follow the liturgy.

Apart from the Arabic versions made to accompany the Coptic biblical and liturgical texts, the earliest texts translated seem to have been apocryphal and hagiographical texts. A good example is *The Acts and Passion of St. Mark*⁵ and apocalyptic and strongly anti-Muslim texts such as the *Prophecy of Samuel of Qalamon* and the *Prophecy of Ps.-Athanasius*.⁶ Although there is no written evidence for the date of their translations, the use of them in works of the eleventh century, as well as the fact that they fit better into a period of strong Christian opposition to Muslim rule, support an early date of translation.

A third group of works partly translated during this period are collections of the canons of the Church. An example is the *Jumlat al-qawānīn* by Abū Ṣulḥ Yūnus, which can safely be dated to before 1028. The lack of a comprehensive study of Coptic Canon law prevents us, however, from any definitive statements on either the process of transmission of early texts or the process of change from Coptic to Arabic as the original language of codification. But it seems clear that the hierarchy would have needed written Arabic texts already in the late tenth century, not only because of the

⁵ Here Arabic MSS of the tenth century give proof of a very early translation. See *GCAL*, vol. I, 265-7, with reference to two MSS: Strassb. or. 4224 and Hiersemann, *Katal.* 500 No. 14; and to A.S. Lewis, *Acta mythologica apostolorum. Transcribed from an Arabic Ms. in the Convent of Deir-es-Suriani, Egypt, and from Mss. in the convent of St. Catherine, on Mount Sinai* (= *Horae Semiticae* IV) (London, 1904), trans. *ibid.*, 'The Mythological Acts of the Apostles, translated. . . . (London, 1904). A second version of the *Life and Passion of St. Mark* is a *maymar* by (Ps.-?) Sāwīrūs of Nastarawah (9th C.), translated by Anbā Murqus of Sakhā and al-Mahallā. See J.-J.-L. Bargès, *Homélie sur St Marc, apôtre et évangéliste par Anba Sévère, évêque de Nestéraveh* (Paris, 1877). See also F. Haase, *Apostel und Evangelisten in den orientalischen Überlieferungen* (Münster i.W., 1922).

⁶ The first was edited by J. Ziadeh, "L'apocalypse de Samuel, supérieur de Deir-el-Qalamoun," *ROC* 20 (1915-17): 374-407. The Coptic text was partly edited by E. Amélineau in *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la mission archéologique française au Caire* IV (1895), 770-89, and *Le Muséon* 53 (1940), 44f.; the Ethiopic text by Pereira, *Vida do Abba Samuel do mosteiro do Kalamon* (Lisbon, 1894); see *GCAL*, vol. I, 276f. Of the second, the Coptic text is preserved in *Pierpont Morgan*, Vol. 25 (Rome, 1922), ff. 52v-77v., and the translation is attributed to both Sulaymān Ibn Tashbīsh and Anbā Murqus of Sakhā. A similar text is the *Prophecy of Ps.-Pisentius of Qift* edited by A. Périer, "Lettre de Pisuntios, évêque de Qeft, à ses fidèles," *ROC* 19 (1914); see also Robert Griveau, "Notes sur la lettre de Pisuntios," *ROC* 19 (1914), 441-3. For none of these have I, however, been able to find evidence for the date of translation.

Arabic civil administration, but also because of the decreasing knowledge of Coptic among Christians. Through its use in texts of the latter half of the eleventh century we know that at least the Copto-Arabic *Didaskalia apostolorum* was translated during this early phase.⁷ The larger Arabic collections of canons are, however, a product of the second phase.

In this first period we see a Church still distinct from the surrounding Arab society, preserving its Coptic heritage. The papyri also show that Coptic was still widely used for daily matters until the early eleventh century. There seems, however, to have been a growing need to explain the Coptic liturgy and the biblical lessons to the people, a need to strengthen the community in the face of the growing Muslim population and an increasing need for canonical literature in Arabic. But Coptic remained the official language of the Church throughout most of the eleventh century, as is evident from the *Lives* of the patriarchs of the tenth and early eleventh centuries composed in Coptic by Mikhā'il of Tinnis.

The Second Phase

With the second phase, translation on a larger scale began in the middle of the eleventh century, rapidly producing three major collections of translated material before the end of the century. The first is the large collection of canonical texts in Arabic assembled around the end of the eleventh century.⁸ The Arabic collection does not simply constitute translations of a previous Coptic collection, but the cumulative result of a process of gathering, translating and reworking Coptic canon law, a process in which new texts by the great patriarchs of the second half of the eleventh century were added. The impetus for this came from Christodulus, Coptic Patriarch from 1047 to 1077, who based his own canonical writings in Arabic on Coptic sources. The collection based on his work and that of his successor Cyril II

⁷ See W. Riedel, *Die Kirchenrechtsquellen des Patriarchats Alexandrien* (Leipzig, 1900); Haneberg, *Sitzungsberichten der k. Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München*, 1869/2, 33-7; F.X. Funk, *Die apostolischen Konstitutionen* (Rottenburg, 1891), 215-42; *ibid.*, "Die Arabische Didaskalia und die Konstitutionen der Apostel," *Theol. Quartalschr.* 86 (1904), 233-48. The Coptic text is lost, but an Ethiopic translation is known and has been translated by J.M. Harden, *The Ethiopic Didascalia Translated* (Leiden, 1920). For the Arabic see William Sulayman Qilada, *Ta'lim al-Rusul, al-Ḍaṣqūliya* (Cairo, 1979, 2nd ed. 1989).

⁸ See *GCAL*, vol. I, 563 and Riedel, *Kirchenrechtsquellen*, 129-34, referring to Berl. ar. 10181, ff. 51-219, a MS based on a copy made by Abū al-Mukāram Yūḥannā b. Sā'īd al-Qulzūmī, the assistant and successor of Mawḥūb Ibn Maṣṣūr, the author of the lives of Christodulus (1047-77) and Cyril II (1078-1092). For both of them see Johannes den Heijer, *Mawḥūb Ibn Maṣṣūr Ibn Mufarrīj et l'Histoire Copto-Arabe* (CSCO 513, *Subsidia* 83) (Louvain, 1989). There is also a codex dated 1204/05 with translations of various canonical writings, including the *Testamentum Domini*; see *GCAL*, vol. I, 571.

was later supplanted by the famous collection of Macarius, a monk of the monastery of St. John in Wādī al-Naṭrūn in the early fourteenth century, based on new translations largely supplied by Abū Ishāq Ibn Faḍlallāh at the end of the thirteenth century, and on the rich canonical material produced in Arabic in the twelfth century.⁹

The second major collection is the dogmatic anthology known as *Al-Ftirāf al-Abā'*, *The Faith of the Fathers*,¹⁰ which consists of 254 quotations from patristic authors ranging from ten folios to a few lines. The collection is arranged chronologically (with some minor deviations) starting with excerpts from the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and some apostolic fathers such as St. Ireneus of Lyons, and ending with the letters of the Syrian and Coptic Patriarchs of the eleventh century. Although no Coptic version has been found, the Arabic collection is most probably based, at least for the major part, on a Coptic collection. But, as in the case of the *History of the Patriarchs* and most likely the canonical collection, it is not impossible that the redactor used numerous different sources. The purpose of the collection is to support the Christological teaching of the Church and its rejection of the *Tome of Leo* and the Council of Chalcedon. Many of the quotations stressing the one nature of Christ are later polemical texts attributed to St. Athanasius as well as to the Roman bishops Felix and Julius, and the Cappadocian and Armenian Gregories.

The third collection is the famous *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*. As has been demonstrated by Johannes den Heijer, the lives of the first 62 patriarchs were translated by Mawhūb b. Maṣṣūr Ibn Mufarrij and his assistant Ḥabīb Mikhārīl b. Budayr al-Damanhūrī starting in 1088.¹¹ The translation was based on four different Coptic sources, some of which have since been lost. Their work was not, however, only a matter of translation, but also of shaping a collection, summarising some parts and adding additional information from various sources. From the marginal notes in the MSS we can even follow their work, how they searched for manuscripts in the monasteries and revised their translations when better texts became available. Mawhūb also then continued the series by writing the lives of the two last patriarchs, leaving an unfinished version of the life of his contemporary behind him.

⁹ See *GCAL*, vol. I, 560-3 for the collection of Macarius. The Arabic text, found *i.a.* in Vat. ar. 149, is not yet edited.

¹⁰ See G. Graf, "Zwei dogmatische Florilegien der Kopten," *OCP* 3 (1937), 345-402. A new study of the sources based on research done on Coptic literature since then will most likely reveal much more about the work of the collector and translator. Neither the Arabic nor the Ethiopic version has been edited or translated in spite of its major influence in both churches.

¹¹ See Den Heijer, *Mawhūb Ibn Maṣṣūr*, especially pp. 95-111. His work, which refutes the attribution of the *History of the Patriarchs* to Sāwīrus Ibn al-Muqaffa', is a model for research on the process of translation.

In addition to the great collections, numerous other translations were, no doubt, made by unknown Coptic scholars of this period. Most probably significant parts of the vast Copto-Arabic collections of apocryphal, apocalyptic and hagiographical texts, as well as works of the Church Fathers, were made during this second period, since it can be demonstrated that they were used by later authors.¹² It is also quite possible that the geographical study of Abū Makārim on the monasteries of Egypt is based on some Coptic sources which he himself or someone else translated for his use.¹³ An indication of a wider use of Arabic Bible translations are the first known Bible commentaries in Arabic by Copts, the commentaries by Murqus Ibn al-Qanbar and Simon b. Kalīl Ibn Maqāra, dating to the last decades of the twelfth century.¹⁴ A first complete translation of the Coptic liturgy by Anbā Gabriel Ibn Tarīk is also to be mentioned.

For the transmission from Coptic to Arabic this second phase is, no doubt, the crucial one. While Coptic is well represented in the papyri until the mid-eleventh century, there is almost nothing in Coptic after the year 1200.¹⁵ Within a little more than a hundred years translation into Arabic became necessary if the texts were to be read and understood. Taking into account the fact that we have three major collections, one historiographic, one dogmatic and one canonical, produced in Arabic on the basis of Coptic sources within the last three decades of the eleventh century, it is even possible to narrow down the most important period to these years. So it seems that Mawhūb and Ḥabīb Mikhāʾil were not alone in searching the monasteries for MSS and translating and editing collections of remaining value. Their translations, as well as many others were, moreover, not made *ad hoc* and not on simple private initiative, but officially sanctioned by the Church. Except for the *Synaxarium* and the revised canonical collection by Macarius, belonging to the third phase, there were to be no more comparable works of translation. To a large extent it seems to have been the collectors, translators and editors of the time of Christodolus II (1047-1077) and Cyril II (1078-1092) who geared the transmission from Coptic to Arabic. It seems, moreover, that these two patriarchs, who are both among the most prominent in the history of the Coptic Church, played a major role in the linguistic shift.

¹² There was even a translation of St. Gregory Nazianzen based on Coptic material before 1078; see Graf, "Zwei Florilegien," 351.

¹³ See Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, 338-40, who still attributes the work on the monasteries to Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Armani.

¹⁴ See Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, 327-32 and 336-8.

¹⁵ For Coptic papyri see L. MacCoull, "Coptic Documentary Papyri as a Historical Source for Egyptian Christianity," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, 42-50.

The Third Phase

The third period is the one best known and best recorded in our MSS. By now Coptic had ceased to be a living language, and thus translations had become restricted to a limited number of scholars and monks who were willing to study their old language.¹⁶ For this Coptic grammars and Coptic-Arabic vocabularies were necessary, and they became an important literary output of the period. With decreasing knowledge of Coptic there was also, however, an increasing command of Arabic and dissatisfaction with the older translations, which were thus revised. This is particularly the case with the translations of the Bible, to which many of the scholars of Coptic language contributed, like Yūḥanna al-Sammanūdī, al-Wājīḥ Yūḥanna al-Qalyūbī and al-Asʿad Abū al-Faraj Ḥibatallāh Ibn al-ʿAssāl. Some of the growing number of commentators on the Bible, such as Ibn Kātib Qaysar and al-Muʿtaman Abū Ishāq al-ʿAssāl, had translators working with them.¹⁷

Probably the most significant translation was, however, the *Synaxarium*. This vast Copto-Arabic collection of lives of saints, reaching from *Genesis* to the Middle Ages, is connected with two bishops of Malīj in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, Buṭrus Sawīrus al-Jamīl and his successor Mikhāʾīl. Although the sources were all Coptic, there is no evidence that the entire *Synaxarium* was translated from one source. Again the translators had to collect and edit material from numerous sources. A second collection dating from this period is the canonical material edited by Macarius of St. John in Wadi Natrun. Since several of the most important parts of his collection are known to have been translated some decades earlier by Abū Ishāq Ibn Faḍlallāh, he seems to have relied on Arabic sources as well.¹⁸

¹⁶ M. Krause in his "Koptische Literatur," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* III (Wiesbaden, 1980), 694-727, calls Mark III, who was patriarch from 799 to 819, "the last Coptic author." T. Orlandi, who in his *Elementi de lingua et letteratura copta*, agrees with Krause, has modified this in his "Coptic Literature," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, 80, stating for the period from the beginning of the ninth century: "Almost no original production can be detected."

¹⁷ For example, Yaʿqūb al-Anṭūnī on whose work Ibn Kātib Qaysar based his discussion of the text.

¹⁸ See *GCAL*, vol. I, 569-86. The translation of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Testamentum Domini*, which is not preserved in Coptic, were made in 1295 by Abū Ishāq Ibn Faḍlallāh; see A. Baumstark, "Überlieferung und Bezeugung der *diatheke tou kuriou hemon Iesou Xristou*," *Römische Quartalschrift* 14 (1900), 1-45; F.X. Funk, *Das Testament unseres Herrn* (Mainz, 1901). Other texts include the *Canones apostolici*, on which see *GCAL*, vol. I, 572-7 (the Coptic text was edited by P. de Lagarde, *Aegyptiaca* (Göttingen, 1883), 209-38, with an English translation by G. Horner, *The Statutes of the Apostles*, *ibid.*, 295-363), and the so called *Sunna of the Apostles*, on which see *GCAL*, vol. I, 578ff. Of the latter a translation from Coptic to Arabic is attributed to Abū Ishāq Ibn Faḍlallāh. Other texts are the *Oclateuch of Ps.-Clemens*, on which see *GCAL*, vol. I, 581-4 and the *Canons from Nicea*, on which see *GCAL*, vol. I, 586-93. See also Felix Haase, *Altchristliche Kirchengeschichte nach orientalischen Quellen* (Leipzig, 1925).

Besides these collections and the well known linguistic and exegetical endeavours of the great authors of the period, there must also have been a fair number of translations of apocryphal and patristic material. Since many of these texts are not preserved in Coptic these translations are of great significance. In addition to Coptic authors, reaching from St. Antony the Great to the patriarchs of the eleventh century, there are numerous anonymous apocrypha that probably belong to this period, such as the *Testamentum Adami*,¹⁹ *The History of the Babylonian Captivity*,²⁰ *The History of Joseph, Son of Jacob*,²¹ *The History of the Jews* (by Joseph ben Gorion, the so-called "Josippon"),²² *The History of the Flight to Egypt*,²³ *The History of Joseph the Carpenter*,²⁴ and *The Lament of the Virgin*,²⁵ just to name a few. It is of course possible that some were translated earlier although this cannot yet be proved from the manuscripts. Probably the greatest of the thirteenth century authors, al-Ṣaḥī Abū al-Faḍāl Ibn al-ʿAssāl, is credited with translations of numerous anthologies of patristic texts, especially with a collection of the homilies of St. John Chrysostom. Other authors of the period used numerous patristic texts in Arabic translation, supposedly made at their request.²⁶

If we may characterize the first period of translation as more popular and provisional, and the second as one geared by necessity, the third is the period of more scholarly work on the sources. With growing relations with other parts of Christian Arabic literature and an immense production of Arabic texts of their own, translations are no longer at the centre. Contrary to the earlier periods, the sources are now not only Coptic but also Greek and Syriac. In addition, older Arabic translations often from other communities are used, and in the case of collections material already translated is combined with new translations.²⁷

¹⁹ Under this title there are two different works, both known also in Ethiopic; see *GCAL*, vol. I, 200-3.

²⁰ See *GCAL*, vol. I, 213; for the Coptic version, see A. van Lantschoot, in *Le Muséon* 48 (1935), 289f., and E. Galtier in *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 4 (Le Caire 1904/5), 177f.

²¹ Edited by E. Amélineau, *Contes et romans de l'Égypte chrétienne II* (Paris, 1888), 97-151; *GCAL*, vol. I, 205f.; for the Coptic, see Carl Wessely, *Griechische und koptische Texte theologischen Inhalts V* (= *Studien zur Geschichte und Papyrskunde* 18) (Leipzig, 1917), 22f.

²² See *GCAL*, vol. I, 221f. The Coptic version is lost, but the text is referred to by Coptic authors such as Abū Shākir Ibn al-Rāhib, Ibn Kātib Qaysar and al-Ṣaḥī Ibn al-ʿAssāl.

²³ See *GCAL*, vol. I, 227-34. One version was most probably composed by the Coptic author and bishop Zacharias of Sakhā in the early ninth century.

²⁴ The Coptic version is lost; see *GCAL*, vol. I, 234f.

²⁵ See *GCAL*, vol. I, 247f. Coptic fragments are given in A. Mingana, "The Lament of the Virgin," *Woodbrooke Studies II* (Cambridge, 1928), 182-210 (see his introduction, 163-82).

²⁶ A translation of Ps.-Dionysius was used by al-Muʿtaman Abū Ishāq al-ʿAssāl; see *GCAL*, vol. I, 370.

²⁷ For an example of a Greek source, see the translation of Ps.-Macarius noted in *GCAL*, vol. I, 390 (Vat. ar. 80 (13th century)).

Although there is only very little material on which to base any conclusions, I have the impression that there is a development in the skills of translation. The first translations, including the *ʿItirāf al-Abāʾ*, seem to have been made with a very poor knowledge of literary Arabic. This is also true for much early liturgical material, probably based on oral and *ad hoc* translations. The second period, including the *History of the Patriarchs* gives the impression of much more careful work and better command of Arabic, whereas the third has examples of some quite good translations. In the case of the *Letters of St. Antony*, with which I have worked more extensively, the Arabic translation is very faithful to the parts which have been preserved in Coptic, and at the same time rather easy to read and understand.²⁸

To conclude, it should be stressed that these are only some remarks based on my reading of Graf's *Geschichte*, numerous catalogues, the edited translations and pieces of research on single manuscripts. Still, it is useful to try to distinguish three periods with their own characteristic features. It could be added that there is also a change of Coptic dialect. While the first translations were largely based on Sahidic, the later ones are often based on Bohairic translation of Sahidic sources. The most important conclusion, besides emphasising the need for more research, is the conviction that the crucial decades for the transmission from Coptic to Arabic are the last decades of the eleventh century. In this period of growing tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean on the brink of the Crusades with periods of unusual political influence for the Copts under Fāṭimid rule, the Coptic Church collected and edited its heritage in translations into the language current in society. Whether this is to be seen as "the death of a culture" or as "inculturation" is a question which must be left for another time.

Summary

In the process of the translation of the writings of the Early Church into Arabic, Egypt constitutes a case of special interest. On the one hand the Copts began to use Arabic as their language of expression much later than the Melkites (Greek-speaking Christians in the Orient) or the Syrians, on the other their transmission from Coptic into Arabic was much faster. Beginning in the eleventh century, the Copts had translated most of their patristic heritage before 1300. Almost all the great Copto-Arabic writers belong to this period. This article attempts to describe this process, dividing the translations into three distinct periods. The first covers the translations made in the

²⁸ See S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony. Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint* (Lund, 1990; second enlarged edition, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995).

tenth and early eleventh centuries of mainly liturgical, biblical, apocryphal, hagiographic and canonical texts, usually made by private initiative and generally of rather poor quality. The second covers the translations of three large collections, one canonical, one dogmatic, and one historical, all made in the second half of the eleventh century and all part of a much more united effort supported by the authorities of the Church. The third covers the translations, mainly of patristic authors, as well as the thorough revisions of earlier translations, made by scholars in the late twelfth and in the thirteenth centuries and generally of much higher standards. The change of language for an entire culture and its heritage is an extremely important process, and in this case a rather fast one, and it deserves much more attention from historians, theologians and linguists.